American experience, as they were beginning to fall into perspective during the period which followed the Civil War and its aftermath, the Gilded Age. The Jeffersonian abstractions of idyllic pastora!!cm, and the implicit dream of individual destiny fulfilling itself in the benevolent laws of nature, and in an ideal of individual conduct maturing itself under the civilising force of social obligation, had already been exhausted in the defeat of the South and the Southern aristocracy. On the contrary, the Hamiltonian idea! of an urban industrial set-up, implying a limited autonomy to the individual, and a vigorous emphasis on the factors contributing to the emergence of a centralised affluent society, was being realised with an almost aggressive precipitancy, first in the North, and then wherever the hand of the North went plucking the fruits of industry. The Gilded Age was an age of intoxicating opportunism in regard to material expansion. But inwardly it was an age of lost opportunities in regard to the values of the spirit, and the unobtrusive civilities of an adult culture which had overgrown the troubles of adolescence. There was yet another force in the intellectual history of the times that forced its entry into the conscious aesthetic sensibility of the age. It was the proliferation of social, biological, astronomical, geological and anthropological ideas which, given their unchecked growth, might have radically altered the social structure. But the expected result did not come about, because of the Genteel Tradition which had made a conscious myth of the American individualism and had soft-cushioned the revolutionary impact of ideas.

American individualism became a convenient middle ground, accommodating extreme social and intellectual attitudes, and protecting the inner core of the American traditional structure of society from the onslaught of change. This intellectual middle ground turned a potentially revolutionary age into an age of mild transition. But the literature of the times absorbed, as an aesthetic feed-back, the

change-enforcing orientations of the intellectual outlook of the times.
In the American literature between the Civil War and the twentieth century, the clash of ideas and the resulting spiritual and intellectual tensions were reflected sharply.

The most outstanding consequence of the climate of ideas during the period was not so much a search for authentic tradition distilled by introspective memory out of a legendary past, but rather a conscious search for the meaning of the reality of present experience